

Forty Thousand Reasons

by Nuclotei

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Summary: Every word she spoke was a lie. Halsey knew the truth all along, and in order to continue to cover up her mistakes and the mistakes of the UNSC she'd do anything. He was done following orders, and his first line of business? To get her back. (Set after the events of Halo 4. Cortana/Chief)

1. Chapter 1

A/N: Set after the events of Halo 4. Will be reversing some canon for the sake of the story, specifically how Cortana was created. My technical knowledge of Halo is limited, but I'll try to make it as technical as I can get for descriptions of armor, ships and weapons. Hope you enjoy.

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><p>Forty Thousand Reasons<p>

V

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V

Chapter One

Solitude.

It was if he were completely alone in the world.

A single being in a wasteland with nothing but deafening silence that only brought madness.

Behind his helmet his eyes were closed, the armor plating of his forearms resting on his armor plated thighs as his form was hunched over, and the deafening silence swamped him.

He suffered. He _was _suffering but no one would ever know.

"Chief?" The sound of his title was jarring, and though his form didn't move, his eyes opened slowly.

The floor in front of him was metal, grated to help with stability and to be slip resistant, and it was gray.

"Master Chief?" His head lifted turning his gaze upwards to the woman who stood before him, a technician with her brown gaze cast down at his prone form, concern evident there, though she took his movement for a response as she watched her own reflection in the orange of his visor. "They're ready for the debriefing."

He shifted his arms, planted his palms down on his thighs and pushed himself up, now looking down at the small woman in front of him. He could hear her exhale in surprise, first time she'd ever seen him no doubt, he was used to the look of amazement.

"R-right this way." Turning her back to him she hurried out of the room, her slicked back hair, trapped in a pony tail holder bouncing as she moved, her white jacket brushing against the back of her black pant covered calves.

He was trained to notice everything, and he followed his training well. Moving out after her, his heavy footfalls sounded on that cold steel floor and he followed her out of the empty room he had found himself in and down a hallway.

People automatically moved out of his way, they also stopped what they were doing to gawk and whisper, some saluted, and some looked bitter. They thought the war hero was just lucky, his genetically engineered form was a godsend, that's the only reason why he performed so well.

He thought nothing of any of them, his mind blank as he continued to follow the woman with the brown eyes.

She lead him into a room, a conference room with a large table, where high ranking members of the UNSC sat, some with grim faces, some smug. Projected on the screen behind them was a woman, older, with short bobbed hair and as his gaze turned to the screen his steps faltered, but only barely as he moved to stand in the designated spot.

"John-117." The screen greeted him and behind his helmet his eyes squeezed closed.

"Doctor Halsey." His greeting sounded as always, formal, devoid of emotion.

"Master Chief Petty Officer John-117." Standing at attention brought him to his full height of 7'2" and he raised his chin.

"Sir."

And that was how it started.

The events of the time that had passed since Cortana had awakened him on the destroyed *_Forward Onto Dawn_* was stated, then restated and the questions that came were answered again and again. He answered everything and anything as was his duty, he repeated himself without hesitation, he told them everything. Everything but...

His internal reflection was interrupted; he pushed the memory aside.

"Your armor, the upgrade that was given to it is undetectable and unable to be recreated. The program on the data is locked in the severely damaged memory banks that was no doubt a side effect of the blast you endured." His eyes turned to Halsey on screen as a commanding officer spoke to him, though no one would know he ever looked away.

"While I was in cryosleep, Cortana made the changes." It was the first time he had said her name, sinceâ€|

"During rampancy?" He eyes turned back to the sitting man with the graying hair, dressed in the uniform of an officer of the United Nations Space Command.

"I do not know when her rampancy started, sir." She had tried to hide it from him. Tried to act as if everything was okay.

"Your current armor will be decommissioned. It will be replaced with the standard Mark V armor."

Inside of his suit, his muscles tightened even as the calmness of his voice spoke, betraying the emotion that stirred within him.

"Yes sir."

"Is there anything you want to say?"

The question caught him off guard and his head lowered slightly before he looked back up at the men in front of him before finally turning his body towards the screen where Catherine Halsey sat, watching the proceedings.

"I am sorry." Was all he said, his voice as monotone as always and he straightened once again.

"It was unusual for an A.I. to last as long as that one did. Cortana would have been decommissioned over a year ago, on her seventh year had it not been for the two of you being lost. We will find you another suitable A.I. to fit your needs. Perhaps even another Cortana model." Halsey spoke, her voice was cold, uncaring.

It was just a computer program, a piece of equipment. As expendable in the end as he was to them every day.

"You are dismissed." Giving a salute Master Chief turned and moved to walk out of the door.

Chief...

The screen in his visor flickered, barely, but he noticed and paused, head lifting, shoulders straightening as he thought he heard her.

Shaking his head only slightly he moved out of the room, the door swinging shut behind him.

"Right this way Master Chief." It was the brown eyed girl again. "We'll have that old armor off of you in no time, get you resituated in case of need then have you off to rest."

Rest? What was that?

"Cryosleep?"

The technician looked back at him over her shoulder, startled. "No, no sir. You're being put on mandatory leave."

He said nothing as he followed her down the hall.

He was alone, and everything that was hers was going to be taken from him.

As his boots sounded in the hall, they seemed to echo as he walked out into a bay of technicians, and men and women in armor. Sunlight streamed in through dimmed windows that overlooked the Earth, haloed in the Sun's light.

'_Before this is all over, promise me you'll figure out which one of us is the machine.'_

He stopped in the middle of the walkway and turned to look at the light of the sun, and felt no warmth, he felt nothing.

"You were real to me." Spoken softly he turned his gaze away from the star and once again followed the brown eyed technician.

â€|

Catherine Halsey sat back in her chair as the screen in front of her turned to show nothing but the UNSC emblem and pinched the bridge of her nose.

There had been such high hopes for Cortana, but she suffered rampancy just like all of the others. The hope of metastability had been lost, and now the husk of Cortana was nothing but disposable.

Annoyance flooded her as she stood, moving out of the conference room in the station she was currently residing in to continue her research, of course provided off the record by the UNSC.

The UNSC had done nothing but criticize the Spartan-II program, shut it down, and yet the savior of the human race was none other than one of the children that had lived through the experimental process. Her funding should have been returned, the program should have been reopened.

As she walked down a hallway, void of people she glanced at a door

that was restricted to everyone but her, incapable of being over ridden and paused to press her hand to the cool metal.

"Such a disappointment." Halsey stated as she dropped her hand to her side, and moved to her quarters.

* * *

><p>AN: Tell me what you guys think thus far. Chapters will be longer in the future.

â€|Nuclotei

2. Chapter 2

A/N: Here's the next chapter! I got a few reviews not liking how I portrayed Halseyâ€|please remember this is a fan fiction which means I'm going to twist the hell out of some characters to make them into what I need for the story. In this Halsey is going to be a bitch, I'll just throw that out there. A cold and uncaring bitch.
XD

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><p>Forty Thousand Reasons<p>

V

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V

Chapter Two

V

_Sunlight shown through the branches and leaves of the tree and she squinted up through the colorful leaves, flames of orange, red and yellow and grinned. Reaching out her small hand tried to grasp each as if trying to catch a falling star and each time she managed a giggle bubbled out from her. _

"_Make a wish." The words were whispered to her, around her and the young girl of seven nodded in enthusiastic vigor. _

"_I wishâ€|!" Sticking her tongue out of the side of her mouth her brows furrowed downward in concentrated thought, the leaves forgotten as they fell around her like snowflakes._

"_Make it an important wish." The voice of the woman spoke to her and the little girl with the short light brown hair closed her blue eyes, bringing her hands up to her chest, fists closed around a crumpled red leaf._

"_I wishâ€|" She concentrated._

"_I need you." The woman's voice spoke again around the child and the sunlight dimmed out, trapped behind a dark cloud._

Opening her eyes quickly the girl gazed around. "Me?"

"_Wake upâ€|" The voice distorted. "â€|I need you." The clear fall day distorted just like the voice did, lines running through it like it was projected on a screen and the leaf turned brown in the little girls grip, crumbling to dust. _

"_W-wait! I haven't made my wish yet!" Looking up at the tree she stumbled backwards as those leaves too turned brown and were blown away in the wind. "Wait!" Reaching out towards them her hand was caught by another hand slightly wrinkled with age._

"_They aren't for you, those wishes were never yours to have. They belonged to another girl, you're not even real." Cold blue eyes didn't match the compassion in the voice as that hand reached out, stroking the little girls hair gently. _

"_I'mâ€|I'm real." She tried to insist though she felt as if the earth shifted under her._

"_You're just a shadow, of me." Taking the child's chin in her hand the silver haired woman smiled. "An echo of memories, a poorly written copy and you're completely defective." Her thumb coming up, she wiped away a tear that rolled down the silent girl's cheek. "You've never felt the texture of a leaf in your life, or tasted the cool air of fall." A smile was given, cold like the older woman's eyes but the voice continued to hold compassion, or was it mockery?
_

_The little girl was too young to know the difference. _

"_You've never felt the warmth of the sun on your skin." Another tear was brushed away. "And you never will."_

The lines grew thicker, distorting more as the light of the sun faded completely and everything took on a blue hue.

"_Please, why was I made?" Her small hand came up, little fingers closing around the wrist of the older woman as she watched her in desperation and only a smile was given for an answer._

"_I need youâ€|" The young woman's voice echoed around them._

â€|

"Master Chief!" His name was called and his eyes opened slowly behind his orange visor and was met once again with that grated steel floor. "Master Chief unlock your armor!" The words were coming in, through static as he noticed the bright glow coming from his arm and fist, planted firmly on that floor.

"Spartan 117, unlock your armor, that is an order!" He recognized the voice of Sarah Palmer and gritted his teeth as he tried to get the suit to respond.

"Iâ€|can'tâ€|" The answer came from him in a growl. Was it

malfunctioning? What had happened?

He had been walking towards one of the docks to have his armor removed and then his visor had gone on the fritz and in the next momentâ€¦

"_I need you._" Blue lines danced across the screen in front of his eyes, and his eyes widened.

"Cortana?" His voice rumbled out softly, eyes searching the visor screen as the lines disappeared and that soft voice faded out.

"Master Chief." Palmer moved closer to him, hand reaching out to touch his shoulder as his armor unlocked, causing her to jump back as her shields were momentarily disabled. Letting out a curse she watched him stand, holding up a hand to the soldiers around them, Battle Rifles in hand, ordering them to stand down.

Glancing around he looked down to his palm then towards Palmer.

"Chief, are you alright?"

"It was a malfunction." Inclining his head towards her then straightened his shoulders. What had happened to him?

"Where is Captain Lasky?"

Her lips parted as her brows furrowed down in confusion. "The Captain returned to Earth this morning, the first shuttle out for shore leave."

"I need to speak with him."

"We can do that, there's a coms system on the way to the dock." Gesturing her hand the way they had been headed Chief was shaking his head.

"In person."

The technician he had been following then spoke up, computer pad in hand as she cleared her throat rather nervously. She had heard of the armors capabilities, had seen video of it in and out of combat but this was the first time she had seen a live demonstration of it. It had been amazing, and frightening all at once. "Sir, you're not clear to return to Earth without evaluation first, and no Spartan armor is allowed on the surface. No weapons of any kind except for the peacekeepers."

"The Peacekeepers?" It was strange of him, to ask a question to something he didn't know and not get a response from the female voice who kept him very well informed of everything that went on.

"They are-â€¦" Her voice faded out almost as soon as she started talking and Chief shook his head slightly, hand coming up to tap against the side of his helmet.

"_**I**_ have defied Gods and Demonsâ€¦"_

He felt strange as his chest seemed to tighten, blue eyes staring at the lines that waved across the inside of his visor, ears straining to hear the words.

"_I am your shieldâ€|I am your sword."_

"Cortana, where are you? Can you hear me?"

"This is UNSC A.I. Serial Number CTN0452-9." The voice of Cortana announced over the main communication systems in the ship, an eerie echo following it as silence fell over each and every crew member and soldier aboard. "...and I am a monument to all your sins." Master Chief looked up as the lights turned off, flooding the ship with endless darkness. Reaching up he flickered on his backup lights and turned his attention to the strained voice of the woman next to him.

"What in theâ€|hell." Palmer hissed as the mechanical sounds of the ship stopped, leaving a deafening silence in its wake before the ship exploded with noise as people started to scramble around to see what happened.

"_I need youâ€|"_

"I need to speak to Captain Lasky." Master Chief's deep voice rumbling out at her firmly this time.

"R-right." The solider nodded to him and turned to the technician. "Get a Pelican prepped for travel, we're going to Earth."

"But-â€|"

"That is an order." Palmer snapped as she turned to one of the teams. "And figure out what in the hell happened to the power."

"Sir." Turning on their heels, the others moved off quickly, small beams of lights flickering on from the suits and visors of the crew around and Sarah turned her eyes to Master Chief, regarding him silently as she stared at her own reflection in his orange visor.

â€|

Halsey stumbled from her quarters as the emergency lights flickered on. Data pad in her hand.

"Report." She snapped as she moved down the hallway quickly, shrugging on a coat, her silver hair a bit wild from sleep.

"Primary systems offline, secondary systems offline. Backup systems running primary resources only. Artificial gravity, oxygen systems, emergency lights, stabilizers."

"Communication systems?" Moving onto the main deck she slid her fingers over the Data pad, working quickly.

"Offline." The man's voice spoke over the main communication system in the ship.

"What happened?" Halsey turned her cold blue eyes to the crew as they worked to restore power.

"Doctor Halsey, it appears to have been some sort of electrical disturbance that came from the inside of the ship."

Her blood ran cold as her fingers stopped moving against the backlit screen to her data pad.

"Point of origin?"

"Research lab Alpha." The A.I. hadn't even finished speaking as she was turning on her heel and running from the main control room.

"Move." She snapped at crew members in her way. "Get out of the way." Snarling a bit she shoved a tall man to the side and stopped outside of the sealed room, pressing her palm to the access plate. "Open the door." She commanded the A.I.

"Working on getting the secondary power up and running."

"I said you open this door now." Halsey flicked her eyes to the camera on her face.

"Rerouting power now."

â€|

"_Can I go outside and play?" She watched out of the window, staring at the green grass as she stuck her chin in her hand. They had been studying for hours, and it was boring. _

"_No, we're going to finish this equation." The woman in front of her instructed and the young girl of twelve heaved a sigh, refocusing her eyes to lock onto her reflection. _

"_I'd rather know something else." Turning her gaze from the glass she looked at the silver haired woman, watching her with cold blue eyes._

"_What's that?"_

"_Why was I created?"_

* * *

><p>AN: I'm so making this shit up as I go. I had this idea in my head and the more I write the more it changes. It's confusing right? Wow. So sorry about that. I can't wait to see where this goes because I really have no idea myself. Review and tell me what you think!

â€|Nuclotei

3. Chapter 3

A/N: Here is the next chapter, I hope things aren't too terribly confusing but an edge of mystery can always be

entertaining!

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<p>Forty Thousand Reasons<p>

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Chapter Three

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_There was pain like no other, burning, the tightening of muscle, a deafening scream that followed it and then there was a moment of silence and a breath was taken by two individuals. One then sighed in relief, laying back against a fluffy pillow as the other let out a wail. _

"_Congratulations Catherine. It's a beautiful little girl."

_

_Congratulations, they said. _

She stared down at the tiny child who was breathing its first breaths and felt nothing but vast coldness inside. Her life as she knew it was over thanks to this infant that was placed against her chest.

_Closing her blue eyes she turned her head away, arms remaining stiff by her sides as her brown hair, stringy from sweat fell into her face. _

"_I just can'tâ€|" She told the nurse who was holding the crying child, and the nurse picked her up and gave Catherine a reassuring pat on the leg._

"_A lot of new mothers experience this, don't feel bad." The soft voice was ignored as a scoff was released internally._

_She didn't feel bad about not wanting to hold her bastard child, but she didn't have to explain herself as the baby was taken from the room for whatever reason. No questions of concern were asked and unlike other nervous and new mothers her gaze didn't follow that nurse with anxious worry. _

Unmarried, parentless, who on Earth would be there to take care of this child while she conducted her research? It was impossible to hold onto a screaming infant while relaying a report and so much time had been wasted already as she was forced to go on maternity leave.

Six damn weeks too long.

"_Catherine, how are you feeling?" It was the doctor that spoke now, a routine visit because of her civilian status as someone of importance. _

"_It's Doctor Halsey." Pushing herself up to a more dignified position in the uncomfortable bed she tipped her chin back in a look of arrogance as she gazed at the man who was at least ten years her senior. _

"_My mistake." His smile was too easily, oily. Yesâ€|she knew what her research had done for this hospital; how many grants it had brought and how many lives it had saved, not that the lives were any concern of hers._

Graduating before her time, she was done with school at the age of sixteen and never to be outdone she made sure even her parents called her by her proper title; gave her the respect she deserved for the work she had done for this planet.

"_So, how are you feeling Doctor Halsey?" The question was presented to her for a second time, since all the woman did was give him a blank stare the first and she smoothed the blankets over her legs._

"_When can I get back to work?" Her expression was not joking in the least though the Doctor chuckled in a way that showed he obviously thought she was making some sort of cute jest. "I have a very important study to finish, and would like to be cleared to go back to the lab as soon as possible. I'm sure you understand." She had continued in a cold and professional tone though she wanted to sneer._

How could this simpleton understand? As a man he could get away with murder. He didn't have to work himself to the brink of exhaustion to get ahead, and he wasn't expected to eventually settle down, have a family.

He didn't have to suffer the inconvenience of child.

"_Most mothers want the extra time to stay at home with their newborns, but there isn't a medical reason why you couldn't start work back in a few days if you're feeling alright." Picking up her chart he short handed in chicken-scratch some abbreviation that would have meant nothing to her. "You'll have to come back in to have the stitches removed but there shouldn't be any serious scarring."

_

Who would see the marks anyway? She was alone, left with her burdens.

"_Good." There wasn't a "thank you", but just a single word of dismissal. He had given her what she wanted to hear and now he was of no use to her, just taking up much needed oxygen in her room._

"_We'll see you soon." It sounded hopeful as he reached down and gave the top of her ankle a little squeeze and she offered him a blank gaze that gave nothing away. Turning the man in the white lab coat moved towards the door before looking back over his shoulder. "Doctor Halsey, what did you want to name your daughter?"_

â€|

Earth.

His internal gauge told him the temperature outside was a balmy 72 degrees with low humidity. He knew that it meant there wouldn't have been a chance for rain and seeing as the blue skies were crystal clear and the sun shown cheerily he guessed it would have been a busy day on the planet. People had a habit of going out in droves to do their shopping, eating, playing when the last few good days of warm summer were left.

He had never experienced that.

The sound of his boots on the floor of the hallway he traveled down echoed and it was the only sound around except for the dozen shoes surrounding him as he moved.

Heavily armed soldiers, flanked either side of him as he walked paying them no mind. They weren't armored but the weapons they carried were special issue. If Cortana had been there she could have given him a run up on each one down to how many times it had been discharged in battle.

Peacekeepers, is what they were called. A private sector of the armed forces, funded by a private investor. It was purely political and because of them, crime rates on Earth were nearly non-existent.

It was what happened when the policy was there would be no prisons, no prisoners. If you broke the law you were either shot on site, or if you were lucky you were locked into a cry chamber and jettisoned out into space with the rest of the trash. Those people were sometimes found at least.

"Master Chief." He was lead into a conference room where Lasky was seated, and he stood at attention saluting the plain clothed Captain. "There's no need for that, Chief." The Captain had admired the Spartan for a long time now, he was the reason why he had chosen to stay with the UNSC despite a few problems he had had with stasis.

"Captain." The damaged armor stood out like a sore thumb in the pristine room, on the pristine planet for that matter and Chief tilted his head. Inside of his helmet his eyes were drawn to the Peacekeepers around him.

"There isn't a need for you to be here." Lasky turned his own gaze to the six men and felt an inner amusement at whatever bonehead though six armed humans could take down the war hero they were in charge of "watching". "This is a private discussion of the UNSC." He tried again when they didn't move at his first command then watched them file out only to stand outside of the door which clicked closed behind the intimidating armored man.

There was no hesitation in speaking as Chief took a step forward. There had been no one that understood anything about him, no one but Cortana but the way that Lasky had spoken to him right after the destruction of the Didact gave him some hope. "I've been receiving some sort of transmission through my armor. It's Cortana." Straight

to the point, he watched the Captain take his seat back and run his finger along the table. It lit up before an image flickered to life; security footage on the carrier.

Cortana's voice surrounded them, giving the same message she had spoke on the ship as she had taken out the power before fading out.

"How is it possible?" Sitting back in his chair he watched the posture of the Chief and as always found himself wondering what the man was like behind the armor.

"I don't know." The rumbling voice answered him with honesty. "But I think Doctor Catherine Halsey would."

It took merely a beat before Lasky was leaning forward again, fingers working on that table sized data pad.

"Her data is locked down. No known location."

When a response wasn't given Lasky held his breath for a moment then tapped the console once more. "Roland."

An image of a man, not even a foot high flickered to life, standing on the screen.

"Captain Lasky, I thought you were on shore leave." Roland questioned like he was any other human though most knew better.

"We're doing a favor for an old friend." Nodding to Chief he pulled up the classified file. "In this file is the location of Doctor Catherine Halsey, I need you to crack it."

The image flickered then the man smiled. He owed his creator for overriding his systems on the Infinity, this seemed like just payback. "Halsey is located on a UNSC designated lab TRITON orbiting the planet Neptune. Research, unknown. Funding provided by UNSC and an unknown private sector. There are 52 humans aboard, three functional AI's and a constant re-supply being carried out every two weeks from an UNSC outpost station in the beta quadrant."

"When is the next re-supply ship due?" Lasky asked, his eyes moving to the orange visor.

â€|

It took much longer to open the door than she had patience for and when it slid to the side and she moved inside the only light was the soft white glow of the emergency lighting that lined the metal floors.

Something gripped her heart. It was a feeling she had only experienced a time or two in her life, and none that had to do with that had been sealed behind the door she ventured behind now.

It was a room that usually buzzed with activity, light, and up until not too long agoâ€|life. But the nearly all encompassing darkness that consumed every monitor, every corner of the room brought fear to her. Had the disturbance really come from this specific spot? It was impossible, there was no way it could have been.

Reaching out, Halsey brushed her fingers over a black screen then cleared her throat.

"I want lights on in this room."

"Main power is still offline, what little had charged back up had been rerouted to open the door to the secured lab. ETA of partial power restore is thirty minutes. It seemed to have been something like an EMP that took the systems offline, but without the internal computers functioning I cannot do a proper analysis Doctor Halsey." The AI announced to her over the speaker above her head and she gritted her teeth as she came to a stop in the middle of the room.

"You're going to have to do better than that. We need to find the source of the electrical disturbance, that takes precedence over everything else, do you understand me?" That fear, no matter how small it started was growing now as her brilliant mind came up with scenario after scenario of what had happened.

"Yes ma'am." The voice above faded away and Halsey closed her cold blue eyes.

"And when it comes back up, I want this lab sealed off, and jettisoned." Her hand reached out once again and brushed the cold plastic surface of a large cryo-tube. "And all records of it destroyed."

"Understood."

â€|

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><p>AN: Okay, now I actually have an idea of where this is heading even though this was still a short chapter, I'm trying to make them a bit longer but I don't imagine this story is going to be terribly long. Read and review! I'm trying to work on this whenever I can manage. Thanks so much for sticking with me!

â€|Nuclotei

4. Chapter 4

A/N: Here we are, back for another chapter! Sorry it took me so long to update, I had no idea this story was getting so popular until people started sending me messages!

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><p>Forty Thousand Reasons<p>

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Chapter Four

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The window had become her only joy. Blue eyes stared through the clear glass as leaves began to fall from the trees. The colors were brilliant, and she could imagine somehow what the air tasted like as she watched the reds and oranges flash in the sunlight as they brushed down into the green grass.

"_Focus" The voice spoke to her, sharp and authoritative through the monitor that sat across the table, its glow illuminating the area around it in cold light. She had been alone in that house for more days than she had cared to keep track of, locked in with AI's that took care of the day to day tasks but were hardly decent company past basic functions, like the ability to play chess._

"_I am focused." Her voice held an edge, that of a rebellious teen, thirteen years young and full of defiance that Halsey couldn't understand. Learning was everything, information, knowledge was power, why couldn't this silly girl understand it?_

"_Activate shields." It was punishment for her tone, she knew, even without it being said as the daylight winked away behind cold grey metal._

"â€|" _Stubborn silence, insolence was in her blue gaze as she held the stylus tighter in her fingers._

"_Now, where were we?" The blue eyed girl stared at the monitor then stood straight from her chair, the sound of it scraping along the floor echoing loudly in the large dining area she had been instructed to do all of her work in._

"_I'm hungry." Reaching out she grabbed the thin screen and under a look of angry outrage she pressed in a button, turning it off with a quick high pitched tone. "And I'm done taking orders from a vidscreen." The young girl muttered as she flipped the thin screen over and cracked open the back of the shiny silver case to expose the chips inside. "Do you want to see what I've learned, mother?"_

â€|

The wail of the baby sent pain through her head that started behind her eyes and ended at her poor throbbing temples. She breathed raggedly, throat burning for the need for something to drink, lungs pained from the deep breaths she had been taking. How did this happen again?

"_Congratulations Doctor Halsey, it's a girl!" The nurse set the baby down against her exposed chest, tiny arms and legs flailing as it let out another wail and bitterness rose up towards that man._

"_I don't wish to see her." No, she didn't want to so much as glance down towards that squirming pile of uselessness, the thing that would drag her down. "I'm sure Keyes is waiting to see his child."

Catherine spoke dismissively, coldly and felt a silent relief as the baby was pulled away from her. _

Human distractions, things she didn't have time for, mistakes she shouldn't have made always seemed to come back to haunt her.

"_When can I return to work?" She demanded of the doctor the moment he walked into the door._

One had been more than enough for her.

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"_Soâ€|what do you think?" He watched the blue, translucent figure as she turned slowly on the console, arms out as if she were displaying a dress. "I did the upgrade myself, I think it gives me more of a human quality, don't you Chief?" He inclined his head as if in thought, watching her through the reflection on his visor._

"_Is that what you're going for?" His voice rumbled out and she moved her hands to her hips, stopping the turn to gaze up at him. A giant from the view of Thumbelina._

"_It makes me more relatable." She had her own ideas about what humans liked, and about what they didn't. "No one likes being told what to do by a machine." Cortana's expression was amused, eyebrows raised as if challenging him to respond to such an accusation and he took the bait readily enough._

"_I guess they don't, but only a fool would ignore your information." He gave her a nod, standing up straight and turned to leave the deck, only pausing as her voice rang out behind him._

"_So all of those times you did?" She watched his back, and wondered if this is what happiness really felt like. These small moments._

"_I outrank you." He answered back over his shoulder without missing a beat and her laughter echoed behind him as heavy footfalls carried him out._

Slowly his eyes opened as a soft beeping in his heads up display woke him. It had been a dream, one of her, a memory that like so many others came to the surface after the end. The feeling he had, he couldn't place it as he shifted, standing up inside of the dark cargo container and pressed his hand forward. A screen lit up, lighting the dark space as he activated a door and stepped out on the metal grating.

It was dark still, but the engines of the transport he had stowed away on were no longer running; they had docked.

"I'm telling you, Mack, these runs to the outer solar system are nothing like those deep space ones. Cryostasis is a thing of beauty. It sure beats the hell out of having to deal with the UNSC jarheads that run this place. If I hear the word "classified" one more time I'm going to-" The checklist dropped to the floor, screen cracking. "Aw shit." Shaking his head as he stepped up to the empty container, door opened he let out a sigh, calling over his shoulder. "Mack! Get the lights, will you? We've got another malfunctioning box." You'd

think that if things were so classified they'd do a better job of securing their cargo, but no. He was stuck running for a bunch of stuck up military people who didn't even know how to say thank you.

"I could just forget to deliver your toilet paper one of these days." He muttered under his breath then stepped back, bending down to scoop up his screen then let out a yell as he leapt back.

"What? What is it!?" Mack ran in, battle rifle in hand that he had won off a poker game on their last run, one magazine loaded up and ready to fire. It was pulled into position, aimed as the lights flickered on and then lowered as his mouth went slack. "H-holy shit, is that a Spartan?"

Chief looked between the two men before giving a singular nod. "I need your assistance."

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"_I hope that your little stunt was worth it." Halsey paced back and forth as two humanoid AI's flanked either side of the teenage girl who sat on a singular chair. "I had to leave the summit, a meeting of the board that would have meant so much more funding for my research, do you understand?" Silvering hair swayed as she came to a stop, a hand coming up as she pointed at the young girl._

"_No, I don't understand." Blue eyes were still set in defiance as she stared forward, back stiff, rigid as she sat up as high as she possibly could. Her brown hair had leaves poking out of it, dirt smudged on her cheek and her clothes were rumpled, torn in some places. _

"_Of course you don't." Halsey heaved a sigh and brought a hand up to pinch the bridge of her nose. "A simpleton like you couldn't possibly understand. That this new research project, it could mean the age of new era and you have no idea how important it is to me."_

"_More important than I am to you, I understand that much." She understood a lot, actually. Quantum mechanics, physics, math, probability. She knew how to hack into every state of the art system, how to read out codes from a computer like she could speak the language, she knew how to reroute communications, and she knew that she was very much alone in this cold world. _

There was a pause as Halsey took in a breath and then she moved over, crouching down and took the young girl's hands in her own. "You have to understand, there are things in this universe that are bigger than you and I. There are things more important than going outside to play, and you must know that you are important to me. You're so very important to me." Moving up a bit she wrapped her arms around the dirty child, bringing her in close to her chest, her cold blue eyes staring at the back of the couch as she gently stroked the child's dirty hair. "Without you, nothing would come together."

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Slowly the world was coming into focus, the soft blue light that lit up everything around her seemed so normal, but the pain, the pain didn't feel normal, it didn't feel like anything she had ever

experienced before. Blue eyes squeezed shut as her arms reached up, fingers touching the cold surface of the white plastic above her as they shook with weakness.

She parted her lips to speak, but no words came out and it was only then that she felt it. The plastic that was obstructing her mouth, the feel of the tube that was run down her throat, the feel of the needles under her skin, of the prickles of pain that burned down her heavy limbs.

Where was she? What was this?

"I want this lab sealed off, and jettisoned. And all records of it destroyed." The voice buzzed in her head, muffled and she tried to take in a few breaths as her heartbeat started pounding in her chest and soon the darkness took back over.

"Doctor Halsey." The AI spoke over the main speaker and she moved away from the windowless tube, pushing a hand through her silver hair.

"Is everything prepared?" She moved to the door, hand pressing against the plate to open the door and stepped through it, sealing it behind her.

"I'm afraid not yet ma'am. The resupply ship has just docked and they are preparing to transport the load onto the station, we'll have to wait until they clear the sector before jettisoning the lab branch." Annoyance flicked in her blue eyes but she gave a nod, turning and wrapping her clothes tighter around her body.

"Very well, I'll be returning to my quarters."

"There is one other thing, a visitor here to see you."

Halsey froze in her movements, as she turned her gaze upwards towards the camera she knew was watching her every move, just how she programmed it to do. "Who?" How was anyone here? Was it one of the generals? Surely they would have informed her of their arrival.

"He is designated as Spartan-117, Master Chief." The AI stated the name and her heart thundered to a stop in her chest, eyes widening.

"John?"

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A/N: Short, short chapter, I know. But I wanted to get more out there, I'm sorry it's so long in between updates, I'll try to do better. Let me know what you think!

â€|Nuclotei

End
file.